# **COMMANDING OFFICER'S SPOUSE**

The command tour is one of the most rewarding experiences that can be shared with a spouse in a military career. The opportunity to participate in this special assignment, to add support and in a vital way contribute to the Command's mission, touches a responsive chord in many who are examining this new role. The role has no official status or prescribed responsibilities. The role can be confusing and the lack of clarity may be a source of stress. This uncertainty affords the opportunity to choose the role that is "right" for each person.

Some feel they provide the best support by being a good listener, a sounding board, the CO's confidant. Some feel they provide the best help by taking charge at home and assuming management of the household. Some will follow a profession or a career that both believe is important to the family. Some will follow the "traditional" role of leading, planning, joining, or supporting the many different opportunities and occasions presented to the command.

The role offers an opportunity to "make a difference". The type of support you lend will be personal because the demands of the world, the command, and your family are always evolving. One certainty of the role is a sudden increased visibility. You will be viewed as informative, wise, creative, diplomatic, organized, friendly, etc. Positive views are fundamental to the success of the command. A "Vision Statement" can provide a framework for you and your spouse to define your role by taking into consideration your family's responsibilities and commitments, your career, and your personality and talents. A "Simulated Stone" may be shiny and inviting, however, the "Genuine Gem" will be worth the investment of your time. It is important to have fun and "Be yourself" from the start because once you get comfortable, it's time to let go.

# **EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S SPOUSE**

The role of the Executive Officer's spouse affords an opportunity to support the Commanding Officer's spouse. It may sometimes mean filling in if they are unavailable due to other commitments or when the CO is a bachelor.

This special assignment has no official job description. Thoughtfulness, patience, good listening skills, organizational skills, and a positive outlook are the desired qualities for the CO's and XO's spouses. Family needs, career responsibilities, and personal style will be discussed with the CO, the XO, and their spouses to define their roles.

Flexibility and a desire to be helpful will enhance the CO's and XO's spouse relationship. The XO spouse can be a great source of continuity when there is a change of command. The opportunity to learn is one of the benefits of being the XO spouse.

The XO's spouse position is just as manifest as the CO's spouse. The need for discretion and common sense will be a great asset to the command and its mission.

# **QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

# **Expectations**

What are mine?

What are the Command's?

What are the Navy's?

What role do I play?

What are my spouse's roles?

Discuss expectations with your spouse. Be realistic!

# **Perceptions**

What are my perceptions?

How do my perceptions relate to the facts?

Perception versus Reality.

What are the perceptions of the command?

Am I their leader?

Perceptions are important because that's what people believe!

# **Priorities**

What are mine?

What are my spouse's?

How do I keep them?

Make them! Keep them!

## Goals

What are mine?

What are my spouse's?

Set them! Develop a "Vision Statement." Review them periodically.

# **CHECK-IN LIST**

During the first two weeks:

- 1. Contact the CO/XO Spouse
- 2. Check out the base resources
  - a. Chaplain
  - b. Fleet and Family Support Center
  - c. Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society
  - d. Public Affairs Office
- 3. Social Roster/Recall
- 4. Make a personal call to all in wardroom
- 5. Set up meetings with Ombudsman, XO Spouse, Family Support Group
- 6. Get connected with local "O" Spouse group

# **CHECK-OUT LIST**

Just before change of command/PCS move

- 1. Meet with new CO/XO couple
  - a. Invite them to dinner
  - b. Share information
  - c. Turnover notebook
- 2. Remember it is their change of command, too!
- 3. Thank you gifts all around (Ombudsman & XO/CO Spouse)
- 4. Introduce new spouse to officer spouses and family support group
- 5. BE GRACIOUS, BE THANKFUL, BE GONE!

# **CO SPOUSE – THINGS TO CONSIDER**

Learn about programs, facilities, and resources offered by the military and civilian communities.

Contact Public Affairs Office

Contact Chaplain

Visit and identify yourself to:

Fleet and Family Support Center

What programs do they offer?

Who is the FFSC liaison or representative for your command?

What are the dates of upcoming workshops?

Do they have a Resource Guide for Command Leadership? If yes, get one.

Red Cross

Legal Office

Base Medical Facility

What traditionally has been given for command gifts (was there always a nautical theme, did the departing couple pick it out, was it something that could be engraved, who has the ship's seal)?

Assemble your key contact phone numbers (use handout and expand as needed).

Attempt to establish relationship with XO's Spouse.

Make arrangements to meet with the Ombudsman.

Set up regular meetings with the leadership in the Family Support Group.

Make clear to everyone your intended level of involvement, priorities, and limitations.

Audit the Family Support Group's finances, per group's by-laws.

Attend CO/XO Spouses Workshops.

Attend the graduation of command's Ombudsman from Ombudsman Basic Training. It is customary to present her/him with flowers and the ombudsman pin. Encourage the Commanding Officer to attend and be the presenter if possible.

Attend Ombudsman Basic Training.

Join the local officer spouse club.

**SAGE ADVICE:** Observe the situation before making changes. Watch, listen, and learn.

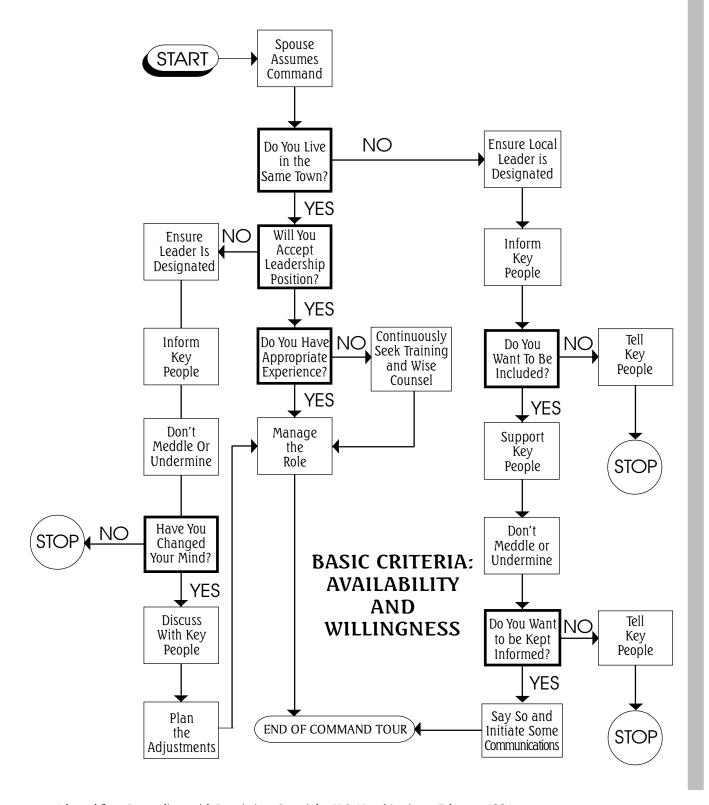
# Remember, to become a good leader, you should try to:

- Be prepared
- Be determined
- Be assertive
- Be humble

- · Be organized
- Be diplomatic
- Be considerate
- Be POSITIVE

# **COMMAND LEADERSHIP**

A DECISION MAKING PROCESS FOR COMMANDING OFFICERS' AND EXECUTIVE OFFICERS' SPOUSES.



## TAKING CHARGE... WITHOUT WEARING THE RANK

By Kathleen V. Logan

Smile! Your husband is assuming command, and now you're out there front and center. Try not to think about all those responsibilities and all those people who will look to you for leadership. Instead, think about a plan for managing your new-found duties. Then you won't have to force that dazzling smile — quite as often.

While commanding officers and executive officers themselves are usually thrilled with their selection and eagerly accept the challenges of command, their wives often view it with mixed feelings: pleased about their husbands' success, and yet concerned about the impact it will have on their lives.

By tradition, the wives of COs and XOs are seen as the unofficial but real leaders of the families in their husbands' commands. That they receive no pay does not mean that the job they do has no value. One has only to look at a command with dysfunctional leadership to know how critical these women are in fostering good morale and positive experiences, which in turn affect retention. Yet there are no written, official duties, only a multitude of expectations. Each woman is expected to assume responsibility without commensurate authority, and that requires her to define and walk that fine line between "recognizing" and "wearing" her husband's rank.

When I asked several women why they found the job of being a CO's or XO's wife difficult, they responded in a variety of ways. One noted that, "No one ever asked, 'Would you please do this?' I was never invited: it was just assumed that I would do everything." Another felt pressured because, "I'm always expected to have the right answer."

Most women chuckled when the question "If there had been an election, would you have run for this office?" was posed. Suddenly, COs' and XOs' wives find themselves in positions they do not necessarily want, and for which they have received little preparation. In addition, many women are not comfortable with leadership roles; "I'm a good follower," one woman mused, "I really do not like being in charge." Yet another woman observed that, "For years, I've been taught that wives shouldn't wear their husbands' rank. I do not identify with that role but now I'm expected to." And all of the women face the fact that they are no longer seen as just one of the group. Even though they behave as they always have, people no longer respond to them in the same way. One lamented, "Not only do we not get invited to as many parties, but when we do go, people often stand off from us. And of course we have to leave first!"

In fact, however, the women who fulfill these responsibilities recognize that they perform a valuable function for the Navy, even though it may be difficult for them to define it. When asked, "Why does the Navy need you?" one observed that, "We support our husbands and help set the tone for the command." A similar sentiment was expressed as, "We provide diplomatic liaison; we complete the circle of communication," or, "We're the umbilicus that attaches everyone to the rest of the ship, particularly when they are deployed." The theme seems to be that, "If the families are OK —and that's our job— then the folks at sea will be OK and can do their jobs better."



You may have more responsibility — and less authority — than you'd like. There'll be some highlights (like homecoming) and some low points. Overall, you can take pride in your role in fostering high morale and retention within the command — as an unpaid volunteer.

Others identified a different aspect: "We are important to the Navy because of the uniqueness of our husbands' jobs; we provide information dissemination to the families, and a support group for those who need or want one." The importance of the position is clearly demonstrated during crisis at sea, when families look to the CO's and XO's wives as an accurate and trustworthy source of information and reassurance.

Most women initially find the position stressful. All too frequently they feel that they will lose control of their lives because of the demands placed on them. Also, they worry that they lack necessary skills and information. "I never anticipated what all would happen when my husband got command, and I had no idea what I was supposed to do," one woman recalled. "It's such a nebulous role." There is no job description for the CO's wife; there is no one correct way to be an XO's wife. Nevertheless, experience has shown that there is a logical process

that women can follow to analyze their own situations. Ideally, the steps will help women manage the positions rather than just react to it.

Before making any decisions regarding their role within the command, women need to keep in mind some basic guidelines:

- Base your decisions and choices on your own experiences and knowledge.
- Know your own needs and those of your family.
   A woman whose children are grown, for instance, can make different choices than a woman with young children.
- Discuss with your husband both his and your attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and expectations concerning your potential role.

### **Decision-Making Process**

The extent to which a wife will become involved depends primarily on two factors: willingness and availability. Figure 1 identifies sequentially those decisions that need to be made once the husband assumes a command position. Delaying or failing to make these preliminary decisions simply confuses everyone in both the official and unofficial Navy organizations.

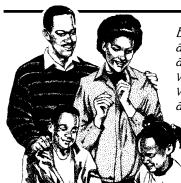
Women cannot assume a hands-on role when they do not live in the same place as the command. Those who try usually end up feeling frustrated, guilty, or inadequate — and the support groups suffer as well. For such a woman, the primary responsibility is to ensure that someone else is designated (either by her or the CO) to fulfill the leadership position. Key people (e.g., the chief of staff, club officers, ombudsmen) must be informed.

Then she can be most helpful by maintaining a supportive hands-off policy. All too often the on-site functioning leader finds herself undermined by the CO's wife who comes to town once every month or two for a meeting and announces, "Oh, no, I don't think that's the way we should do it." Such comments are based on limited information and can only disrupt or destroy the group process. Better that she be a gracious guest. Also, several XO wives who have found themselves as leaders in such situations have stated, "I don't mind keeping her informed, but it's costing me a fortune in long-distance phone calls. Why can't she call me once in a while if she really wants to know what's going on?"

The process is similar for the woman who, by preference or inability, has elected not to become involved in command activities. There are many reasons for this; for example, one woman attended law school, another was confined to bed during a difficult pregnancy, yet another engaged in her own literary career. Circumstances do vary, though, and at some time during a command tour a woman may

change her mind about participating. If she does, however, she must discuss her feelings with key people, then (tactfully!) plan appropriate adjustments.

In either situation, the woman who is not the active leader should realize that she cannot have all of the perks and none of the responsibilities. She or her husband should ensure that the woman who is fulfilling her role is getting full and official credit for her efforts.



Be good to yourself. Eat and sleep well, exercise, and keep close contact with good friends. This will give you strength and avoid undue stress.

The woman who is both willing and available to assume the leadership position must answer a further question: "Do you have appropriate experience or training to manage this situation effectively?" Wives, too, learn a great deal as their husbands move up through the ranks. They have many opportunities to observe what works and what does not. They become wise about Navy life and are able to share this knowledge with less-experienced wives. Sometimes, however, the CO or XO and his wife have only recently married. If she is unfamiliar with Navy life, she is in the unenviable position of being expected to lead without an appropriate background. Adopting the attitude that "My husband is in charge, so I must know what I'm doing" will only cause problems. Any woman who finds herself in this position should acknowledge and accept her lack of background, then seek to educate herself.

# Managing the Role

With these preliminary decisions made, the wife now encounters the "Manage Your Role" box on the chart. Her challenge is to define the role in specifics. First, women must recognize that this is not a normal job. There are no simple, concrete answers and there is no right or wrong way to behave. Since the situation is so ambiguous, many styles or approaches to leadership are possible, and each woman can tailor her role to best fit her life.

Every woman who accepts an active role must address some essential issues:

• Be yourself. Be aware of your values and commitments; know and work within your own talents and limitations. It is fruitless to say, for example, "My first CO's wife was wonderful. I want to be just like her."

- Continue to talk to your husband about how you both see your role functioning. As you learn more, your feelings and ideas will change, so discuss this frequently as needed.
- Set your priorities early in the command tour. You may need, for example, to post a "My family needs to come first" memo to yourself near the phone. At the end of a whirlwind tour, one CO's wife who was all things to all people all of the time said, "I neglected my own children. I'll never do that again."
- Identify your role in the command and the extent to which you can or will serve; make up your own mind about what you want to do.
- Announce to the spouses' group your personal philosophy about the situation (e.g., "I believe in working in a democratic manner. I will act as an adviser but will abide by the group's decisions.") This only takes a few minutes but helps minimize the "We'd-better-wait-and-feel-her-out" period.
- Tell key people how you will operate. It is very helpful, for instance, for the CO and XO wives of the command to meet together first. Then, preferably, they will meet with support group officers and ombudsmen. The earlier this is done in the tour the better.
- Have your husband identify an official Navy point of contact for you (e.g., the chief of staff) for emergency situations. Make sure this contact knows who you are and where and how to reach you.
- In any crisis, keep quiet, use discretion, and stay calm. If it is a Navy incident, avoid speculation about the cause since other people tend to see you as part of the official structure.
- When you leave town, notify someone, such as XO's wife, and tell her your plans and phone numbers in case of an emergency.
- Know how to maintain operational security.
- Remember that spouses are not in the military; giving orders is never appropriate.
- Be good to yourself. Eat and sleep well, exercise, and keep close contact with good friends. This will give you strength and avoid undue stress.

Beyond these basic essentials, women have a wide range of options available to them. Women who have been through command tours have offered suggestions on managing the role once the options have been identified. Most common is, "Have a good friend outside the command, someone who is completely trustworthy of your confidences." It may be inappropriate to discuss certain issues with people in the command (e.g., "Lieutenant Smith's wife is driving me crazy! What can I do?"), but it is essential for the wife to talk over her frustrations with someone

for her own well-being.

One wife observed that, "Just because you feel that something needs to be done doesn't mean that you have to do it yourself... you cannot. Encourage others to share the responsibility." Someone who learned this the hard way laughed and said, "You won't die if you say no; practice it a few times." Also, giving lists to people (the ship's organization chart, phone tree, referral services) can help forestall many questions.

Setting telephone hours is totally fair, especially at night. One woman joked, "Don't call me after 9:30 p.m. unless you're dead!" and another told the squadron wives that "5:30-7:30 is family time. Please call before or after those hours." Making such announcements helps the families since they know what guidelines they are working within.

I have found it useful to keep a notebook near the phone just for command business. In the front I write the names and phone numbers of officers and ombudsmen, the Navy point of contact, and other such essential information. Each time I make or receive a call, I record the date and a very brief notation of what transpired. If I send a message, I write it out word for word. The notebook is particularly valuable in a crisis when there are many phone calls and an abundance of (sometimes conflicting) information. In other words, it will provide a correct sequence of events to be reviewed after the crisis. In addition, the notebook is invaluable as a reference if questions arise, and as a source to be shared with the incoming CO's or XO's wife.

Women need to talk to their husbands before deployment about communications and mutual expectations. When at sea, men tend to assume folks back home can do anything. One wife received a message, "Seaman Jones hasn't heard from his wife and is worried that she may want a divorce. Please call her and find out what's happening." Women must define to their husbands what their limits are and what specific information must be included in a message request for help. Husbands and wives will develop and refine their means of communicating if they share their thoughts and experiences with each other.

Particularly in aviation commands, family members ashore should be encouraged to fill out emergency data information sheets to be kept in sealed envelopes and opened only in an emergency. If the CO's wife is leaving town, she should give the packet of envelopes to the XO's wife or another responsible person until her return.

All of the women I talked to found training seminars or workshops worthwhile. Such sessions provide a great deal of information of specific interest to wives of COs and XOs, or whoever is filling that position.

Fleet and Family Support Centers are tasked with providing and coordinating such workshops throughout the Navy.

### Impact of the Command Role

Personal Goals: When queried, "Where do your personal goals fit in?" wives of COs and XOs all indicated the difficulty they had in balancing personal goals, family needs, and command functions. In general, women who choose to be active leaders found that their personal goals often fit in only "in the wee hours of the night and whenever he's deployed." One admitted, "I get a bit angry, a bit frustrated, because I can't make my business grow." Then she added, "But my husband is important to me; if I have to take the Navy to have him, that's OK. I do have a love-hate relationship with the Navy, though."

Another woman said, "I never tried to work full-time and be a CO's wife at the same time. In many ways I have subordinated my goals to my



You may find yourself on call for emergencies around the clock, but it's okay to set telephone hours, when you don't take routine calls. Your caller will appreciate the guidance.

husband's." As for the popular suggestion to develop a "portable career" and be active in the command at the same time, the consensus was, "It doesn't work!"

On the whole, advice was to "accept the moves, the going back to the bottom rung of the ladder. If you don't, you'll just make yourself miserable." The wives generally agreed that the Navy, and especially command tours, placed extra demands on them.

Despite the potential limitations on their own aspirations, these women love their husbands, chose freely to work on their behalf, and "never felt inhibited. I figured sometime I'd get to do what I wanted. [Besides,] life is always a juggling act anyway."

Benefits: All of the wives of COs and XOs whom I interviewed agreed that the position provides "leadership experience you can use. By all means, put it on your resumé." Special friendships, maturity, and sense of accomplishment result from successful leadership.

Command positions offer the couple "special opportunities. Relish the times and traditions surrounding you." One wife valued the fact that "this is an opportunity for my husband and me to work together as a team and it has strengthened us as a couple." The

woman who preferred being a follower discovered capabilities she didn't know she possessed and was proud of her capacity for growth. "Another benefit, if you're lucky," one quipped, "is a good parking spot!"

Impact on the Marriage: In some ways, command responsibilities are like having a baby: If the marriage is sound, this experience will likely strengthen it; if not, it may damage the relationship. One CO's wife knew a commander who "perceived that his job effectiveness depended on how well his wife performed." Someone else was upset to learn that "all those things I did during deployment, things I did to support my husband... he didn't care whether I did them or not!"

Demands of the role can be pervasive. "I got sucked in; I lost definition of myself. I didn't know who I was or who I was supposed to be. I had to extract my inner self from extraneous activities because they were defining me. And I like to be independent, strong, to do my own thing." This lady struggled to define the boundaries between self and husband. She also felt that "It's a matter of honesty. How honest can I let myself be? I've seen many women who couldn't be honest with their husbands; they couldn't afford the emotional risk because they might lose their marriage."

The more senior the officer, the harder a wife finds it to maintain her own separate identity when the men and the women around see her one-dimensionally, simply as "the CO's wife."

### Conclusion

While I was writing this article, a friend who was in town called. When I told him what the article was about, he asked, "Will you talk about folks like me?" He is a retired Navy commander. His wife is on active duty and on her way to be XO of a command. His position as husband is not unique, perhaps, but it's a fairly recent occurrence and, as more women assume command, such situations will increase. This article, however, is based on observations and experiences in which males have had command. I believe strongly that the same decision-making process will apply to men, but that will have to be tested by the actual experiences of the husbands themselves.

In many ways, when a man becomes an XO or CO, it precipitates a crisis for his wife, with "crisis" being defined as a time of significant change. In Chinese, the word "crisis" has a double meaning: trouble or opportunity. Armed with the knowledge that their role can indeed be managed and that they have many options, women should feel they can choose to make the command tour an opportunity for personal growth through leadership.

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# **FABULOUS FIFTEEN TIDBITS**

# to help you think about de<u>F</u>ining your role as a leader on the command team

#### **FUN**

It's got to be fun or you must make it fun. Why be involved if it's not? Laugh! Choose to be positive! You're husband/wife is doing what he/she loves (hopefully) you should enjoy it too.

#### **FRIEND**

Be one, make one, have fun! There is a gift to being friendly, even if you are not the most outgoing person, always introduce yourself and socialize! Rely on your core group of friends to keep you grounded and energized.

#### **FORTHRIGHT**

Be honest, genuine and up front. Keep your character intact.

### **FELLOWSHIP**

Creating or maintaining that esprit de corps, camaraderie and Navy spirit.

#### **FESTIVE**

Be ready to open your home and entertain. A generous attitude and giving spirit are a plus and very contagious.

#### **FULL OF INFORMATION**

Have it and know where to get it. You must have a level of competency!

### FAITHFUL AND COMMITTED

To yourself, your spouse, your command, and your country. Remain loyal and trustworthy.

#### **FOUNDATION**

Don't neglect your spiritual side!

### **FORTITUDE**

Work to remain strong — physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

### **FOCUSED**

Try to stay on the task at hand, whatever it is. Be an organized problem-solver.

### **FLEXIBLE**

Be willing to bend. Accept others as they are and be willing to listen to their thoughts and ideas.

### PHONE TREE

OK, sounds like an "F," but really isn't. Be in communication with your spouses, with your command, and with families. Be available to people.

### **FAMILY**

Don't forget yours! It's a busy time. Make time for your kids, your spouse and yourself.

### FLEET AND FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER

A great resource! Don't forget to use it.

#### **FREEDOM**

We are blessed to have it in this country. It's what our spouses are out there maintaining. Remember that patriotism.

~ By Carole Sharpe

# HELPFUL HINTS TO CREATING A POSITIVE COMMAND CLIMATE

# 1. Help to create a climate of respect and trust.

Set a positive tone.

Ensure each person is seen as a valued member.

Ensure each person is encouraged to contribute.

Express appreciation for people coming to events and contributing.

Discourage gossip or rumors.

# 2. Show your interest (whether actively involved with command or not).

Make contact with other members of the command team (XO and CMC spouses and Ombudsman.)

Discuss your level of involvement, so they know what to expect from you.

If geographically separated, be sure they know who will be acting in your stead (and allow that person to act).

Invite XO spouse and ombudsman to lunch regularly.

Make and maintain contact with families in the command.

Through support group activities.

Through periodic telephone calls (especially helpful during deployment).

Through welcome note, phone call, or small token such as a plant to new members of the command.

Through contact with families not in the local area.

Through birthday cards to family members or cards for special occasions.

Through articles in the ombudsman's newsletter.

Even spouses geographically separated can show interest and maintain contact using any of these methods above.

# 3. Encourage activities for the group.

Be involved.

Don't have to plan or manage every event (find those in a group who like to plan or lead).

Attend according to your schedule and interest.

Show interest in family members and how they are doing.

Listen to needs of the group (varies with age, interests, and needs).

Help plan activities to meet their interests and needs.

Number of attendees is not significant if meeting the needs of those who attend.

Suggest community project (i.e., Adopt a School, toy drive) that involves all members of the command.

Don't force togetherness if the group is happy and productive with it's own activities.

Suggestions for group activities:

If the ship is going to a special port, plan an event around that place (food, music, dress).

Make Your Own Pizza Night — everyone brings a topping.

Wedding Album Night — shared memories (chance for group to see you as a real person).

Potluck supper with speaker (use Fleet and Family Support Centers).

Try to plan command activities that include single sailors in the command.

Plan events for the children of the command.

# 4. Maintain a positive attitude.

Assess your style and comfort level, then act accordingly.

Take time out for yourself to reduce stress.

Realize that your experience and "calm in the storm" are valuable assets to the group.

Take advantage of opportunities to nurture younger spouses.

Include friendships outside the command in your support network.

Support your spouse - complement each other's roles.

Enjoy.

### Turnover:

Maintain a "notebook/journal" during command tour.

Social roster

Phone trees

Support group information

Important telephone numbers

Calendar of activities

Crisis information

Copies of newsletters

Invite incoming CO spouse to lunch and share "notebook/journal" as well as other thoughts on the command.

Introduce incoming spouse to other members of command family.

# SUCCESSFUL GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

"The CO/XO spouses are inherently responsible for the support group," said Christina Tedeschi.

# **Equality**

- Mutual Respect
- All ideas & opinions valued
- Everyone contributes

## **Effective Communication**

- Feedback on ideas not individuals
- Active listening
- Shared air time

# Leadership/Followership

- Flexibility
- Multiple roles
- Safety and Collegiality

# Mission Clarity

- Concrete objectives/vision statement
- Responsibility and authority
- Timelines

# ASSESSING YOUR FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP: A GUIDE FOR INCOMING CO/XO SPOUSES

- 1. Does your command have a Family Support Group (FSG)?
  - a. Is it a combined (officer and enlisted) group?
  - b. Does your group have a set of by-laws?
  - c. Who is allowed to participate in FSG activities (i.e., are girlfriends, boyfriends, and relatives of the crew member allowed to take part as well as a crew member's spouse)?
- 2. How often does your group meet? Does the schedule change according to the ship's schedule? Where are the meetings held?
- 3. Does your group offer babysitting? If so, who baby-sits? Are the baby-sitters paid? Does support group funds pay for the baby-sitting or do the individuals attending pay?
- 4. Does your group offer projects or have guest speakers for the children?
- 5. Does your group have refreshments at the meetings? If so, who provides them?
- 6. Is your Executive Board made up of the traditional positions (i.e., President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary)? In addition to the elected board members, are there special committee chairmen? Does your group allow someone other than a crew member's spouse to hold either an elected position or a committee chair?
- 7. Does the command hold a formal installation of new Executive Board officers? Does the command recognize the Executive Board with special letters or ceremonies when someone is leaving or at any other key points throughout the year?
- 8. How often does the Executive Board meet? Where are the meetings held?

## **ALTERNATIVES TO FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS**

In many cases, the social structure for a command revolves around the Family Support Group. Yet for some commands, these large and sometimes unfocused groups may not be the best type of organization to accomplish what the Command Team desires.

You may want to consider creating a series of smaller committees with specific task-oriented charters and defined time limitations. Some examples of this approach might include:

# Homecoming Team:

Established when the unit deploys, this committee would work during the deployment to prepare for the homecoming. Their membership would be focused on accomplishing the arrangements for the homecoming, including production of a plan, scheduling for services, working with the deployed command and the homeport sponsor to set up the homecoming, creating souvenirs, painting posters, making the lei, and so forth.

# **Deployment Support Team:**

This group would focus on providing practical advice and support the unit's extended family during a forward deployment (or for that matter, during any extended "out of area" operation). This could include facilitating any contact with the Ombudsman, Family Service Center, and Navy Chaplains; arranging emergency baby sitting, setting up a child care cooperative; maintaining a list of repair organizations; hosting evening get-togethers; and establishing a small library of reference materials.

### Social Events Team:

This group might be chartered to work with the unit's Welfare and Recreation Committee. It could help plan and execute a year's worth of social events: Valentines' Day Dance, Easter Egg Hunt, Summer Beach Picnic, Kid's Halloween Party, and Holiday Ball.

# Children's Support Team:

As a one-year task force, a group of informed and concerned spouses might want to examine ways to help the command's children. This could range from collecting and providing information on area schools to setting up educational trips for the command's kids.

# Other Types of Teams:

Committees, or groups could be established based on the needs and desires of the Command Team. Their general structure could be outlined in the Command Charter.

The key here is that rather than having an indefinite, ongoing, and somewhat self-defining Family Support Group, the command could set up a series of specific, time-limited, and command-defined teams to accomplish desired tasks. This may help avoid the personality dominance, formation of cliques, or lack of direction that occasionally occur in family support groups.

## **HOW TO SAY NO**

For many of us, saying "no" is the hardest thing we do. Spouses, friends, children, bosses, colleagues, church, community groups — all weigh in with requests for our time or money or both. We would like to oblige, but we have to refuse demands that will impose too great a cost on our own time and tranquillity. Saying no is every person's prerogative, and it need not seem harsh or unkind. Whenever you find yourself about to say "yes" but wanting to say "no," try one of these strategies.

### "I really admire you."

Begin with a compliment. When asked to serve on a committee, soften the refusal by saying, "I'm so glad you asked, I really admire your organization, but my schedule won't allow me to accept your offer." The same approach works socially. Try: "There's no one I'd rather have lunch with" when turning down a date, or, "I always have a wonderful time at your parties, so I'm really sorry we can't make it."

### "That's an excellent offer."

A friend of mine uses this as one of his favorite phrases: "That's an excellent offer, but we're not in a position to take advantage of it right now," and "Good ideas, but I'm afraid we have to pass on it for the time being." Phrasing your turndown in a positive fashion can avoid hurt feelings, and "right now" or "for the time being" leaves the door open a little.

### "Let me think about it."

Rarely do you have to give a yes or no on the spot. Now, faced with a request you'd rather not accept, say "Let me think about it." The maneuver buys time to come up with an acceptable excuse. Taking time before you say "no" can soften the news. Try: "I'd love to say yes, but I can't right off the bat, give me some time to see if I can work something out."

### "Because I'm mean."

Humor is a fine way of saying "no". We are all amused by the unexpected twist, for example: "I suppose you think I said 'no' just because I'm mean. Well, it's true."

### "It just won't work for us."

Just say it in a matter-of-fact manner. Remember the old adage, "Never apologize. Never explain." Unless your excuse is incontrovertible, it's often best to give none at all. Simply use a phrase like: "I just can't fit it in right now." Most people will not press for an explanation, but if you are questioned, just say: "I'm afraid I have to let it go at that."

### "I'm sorry you have that problem."

Sometimes the hardest person to say "no" to is the one who merely hints around and sighs. For example, the out-of-town friend who mentions, "David has to be in your city on business. If only hotels weren't so expensive, I could come with him." The strategy here is to say, sympathetically, but firmly, "Gee, I'm sorry you have that problem," then come to a complete stop. You don't have to be a rescuer. I've finally learned to say "Hey, that's tough. I hope you can find an answer." A second strategy is to bring the concealed question into the open, "If you're asking whether we can put you up, I'm afraid we won't be able to that weekend."

### "No."

At times the best way to say "no" is to simply say it.

# ABOVE AND BEYOND THE THREE RS

Responsibility ...... Unspoken, but you do have a major role Ready ...... Be prepared or you lose respect and credibility talents... you'll find your helpers that way Rebound and Rebuild ...... You'll do this many times Receptive...... Open minded Recheck ...... Stories you hear will always have two sides Reorganization ....... Take it slow when you are new or you will get resentment Restraint ...... Practice self-control Reinforce and Reinvigorate ........... Through good leadership without resentment RSVP ..... Let your feelings be up front at the very first meeting Rapport ...... Establish a good relationship with the Ombudsman Remembrance ...... How do you want to be remembered Rewarding...... Personal and never ending

# **COMMAND OMBUDSMAN**

Selected and appointed by the Commanding Officer

Be involved in the selection process if possible. You'll be working with the Ombudsman, so your input is valuable.

# **Support Your Ombudsman**

Have CO host a luncheon every 4-6 weeks to discuss concerns of families.

Observe Ombudsman Appreciation Day with a small gift and lunch.

Attend Ombudsman Assembly Meetings with your Ombudsman.

Listen to them.

Be patient with them.

# Develop Rapport With Your Ombudsman

Call periodically to see how things are going.

Meet with them once a month.

Show an interest in what and how they are doing.

Give them information promptly and accurately.

Be a friend. They are worth their weight in gold.

Be available to talk.

BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL AND MENTOR

### **MEDIA**

The media is looking for a story. It's their job. You don't have to speak to them. But, if you do, make certain that you have accurate information. The Navy and Navy families need cheerleaders, and command spouses are often the best choice for getting out the good things our people are doing.

### Media Commandments

Know who your Public Affairs Officer (PAO) is and how to contact them. (PAO of Battle Group, PAO of Fleet)

Before talking to the press, check with your PAO and define your message.

Don't assume the press is on your "side."

Avoid talk about subjects that are better suited for the active duty member.

On policy issues, consider how your opinion may be interpreted.

Never mislead or lie to the press.

Avoid saying "No Comment" or speculating on future events. Refer to the local PAO.

Understand it is your right to say "No" to an interview request.

Do not give out personal information unless you want it in print.

Let your PAO contact the press on your behalf.

Have a few responses at the "ready": i.e., "I'm sorry I can't speak on that at this time." "My spouse's command (fill in the blank) could answer that for you." "I don't have the necessary information to answer your question."

Accuracy is sometimes sacrificed to speed in reporting.

# **COLIN POWELL'S RULES**

General Powell says he always tries to keep in mind a number of rules or thoughts to live by, which he has come upon over the years. Here are some of them:

- 1. It ain't as bad as you think. It WILL look better in the morning.
- 2. Get mad, then get over it.
- 3. Avoid having your ego so close to your position that when your position falls, your ego goes with it.
- 4. It can be done!
- 5. Be careful what you choose. You may get it.
- 6. Don't let adverse facts stand in the way of a good decision.
- 7. Check small things.
- 8. Share credit.
- 9. You can't make someone else's choices. You should NOT let someone else make yours.
- 10. Remain calm. Be kind.
- 11. Have a vision. Be demanding.
- 12. Don't take counsel of your fears or naysayers.
- 13. Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier. (In the military, one is always looking for methods of increasing or multiplying your forces)

# INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Think of what you want out of life — not how much you can get done. Assess all your activities. If they add to your life, keep them. If not, eliminate them whenever possible.

Understand your body clock. It's regular and not as uniform as time from a clock. Identify its peak times. That's when to schedule difficult work.

Don't crowd every minute with some task. If you do, tension rises and effectiveness declines.

Slow down. Don't be addicted to rushing. Know the difference between necessary haste and impatience.

Subtract an old activity when you add a new one.

Source: Keyes, Ralph. Parade. 750 3rd Ave., New York, NY 10017

## **HELPFUL HINTS**

### Communicate

Stay in touch with your spouse, CO/XO spouse, ombudsman, CMC, enlisted support group

Be accessible: have an open door/open phone/be approachable

Personally call and welcome all new spouses to the command

**Phones** — portable ones allow you to get other things done while staying in touch, cell phones allow you to stay on the go

Beepers keep you accessible

**Answering machines**, call waiting, caller ID — time management tools

Ask someone to bring a new person to the next function

Get to know other spouses (lunch, movies, theater, etc.)

**Stop gossip** — encourage others to do the same

**Be prepared** — Life savers — toys/movies for kids, snacks or quick meals for last minute guests, cards and gifts for multiple last minute occasions

# Organize

**Keep a notebook** by the phone — you can't remember everything

**Maintain a resource list** for quick reference when referrals are needed, i.e., Chaplain, Fleet and Family Support Center, Navy Marine Corps Relief, Red Cross

Carry a daily planner — You don't want to overbook

**Keep a calendar by the phone** — transfer items from the planner to the calendar as soon as possible, color code your times

Develop a phone tree/e-mail tree — sometimes you will need help

**Keep an updated roster handy** — Review names frequently. Keep it for social and emergency situations

**Carry important numbers with you** — beeper, cell, work numbers for spouse, ombudsman, neighbor, community, and business numbers

Practice saying "NO," "I'll get back to you." "Oh really."

# Take Care of Yourself

**Spend quality time** with your spouse, family, and friends

**Treat yourself** to something you enjoy (movie, facial, manicure, massage, dinner, cleaning service, shopping, etc.)

Have family code words. Use them when you need a time out

**Relax** — take a warm bath, energize yourself with music

Maintain outside interests

**Laugh** — it's good for you

## **SUGGESTED READING**

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Gordon, Thomas. <u>Leader Effectiveness Training</u>, <u>L.E.T.</u>, <u>The No-Lose Way to Release the Productive Potential of People</u>. New York: Bantam Books, 1977

Komisarjevsky, Chris and Reina Komisarjevsky. <u>Peanut Butter and Jelly Management: Tales from Parenthood — Lessons for Managers</u>. AMACOM, 2000

Maxwell, John C. The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership. Nashville: Maxwell Motivation, 1998

McGraw, Phillip C., Ph.D. <u>Life Strategies, Doing What Works/Doing What Matters.</u> New York: Hyperion, 1999

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Powell, Colin L. On Leadership. Random House, 1910

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